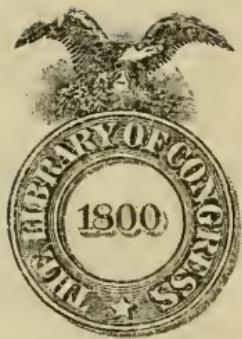


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The YOUNGER GENERATION



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STANLEY HOUGHTON

One Shilling.

THE YOUNGER GENERATION



THE YOUNGER GENERATION

A COMEDY FOR PARENTS

IN THREE ACTS

By

STANLEY HOUGHTON
II

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THE YOUNGER GENERATION

Produced at the Gaiety Theatre, Manchester, by Miss Horniman's Company, under the direction of Mr. B. Iden Payne, on Monday, November 21st, 1910.

SCENE.—*The dining-room of JAMES HENRY KENNION'S house, in Longton Park, a suburb of the large manufacturing town of Salchester.*

The action takes place at the present day, within the space of 24 hours. ACT I., Saturday evening; ACT II., Sunday morning; ACT III., Sunday afternoon.

CHARACTERS

MRS. HANNAH KENNION (*the Grandmother*)
JAMES HENRY KENNION (*the Father*)
MRS. KENNION (*the Mother*)
THOMAS KENNION (*the Uncle*)
ARTHUR KENNION
REGGIE KENNION }
GRACE KENNION } (*the Children*)
CLIFFORD RAWSON
MR. LEADBITTER } (*of the Longton Park*
MR. FOWLE } *Liberal Association*)
MAGGIE (*Maid at MR. KENNION'S*)

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Any wigs or costumes used in the performance of *The Younger Generation* may be hired or purchased reasonably from Messrs. Chas. H. Fox, Ltd., 27, Wellington Street, Strand, London.

THE YOUNGER GENERATION

ACT I

(NOTE.—*In the description of the scene, and the stage directions, the terms "Right" and "Left" are used from the spectators' point of view, not the actor's.*)

The dining-room of MR. KENNION'S house is a large oblong room, comfortable and well furnished. The fireplace is supposed to be in the fourth wall nearest the spectator ; that is to say, in the middle of the row of footlights. A fender and fire-irons are seen ; also the red glow from the fire. The door is to the right of the opposite wall, facing the spectator, and in the left of that wall there is a bow window recess, which contains a table and two chairs. In the left-hand wall is an ordinary window with a sofa in front of it, and nearer the spectator is a writing-desk and a chair. Against the right-hand wall is the sideboard, and lower down a small table and a chair. The oblong dining-table with its longer side toward the spectator, is in the middle of the room, with a chair at each end and two on each side, pushed well under. Two armchairs face the fire, one on each side of the hearth-rug. A bowl of chrysanthemums is on the dining-table, and a plant in a pot on the sideboard. The space of wall between the door and the bow window is occupied by an engraving of a picture by a Russian artist of "Christ Before Pilate," and other good engravings are on the walls.

The blinds are drawn, the fire is burning, and the electric lights are on, as it is late on a Saturday evening in Autumn.

When the curtain rises MR. and MRS. KENNION are alone in the room. He is a middle-sized, pleasant, firm-looking man of 53 with a neat moustache. He is going grey. She is a kindly decided plump woman of 50. Both are thoroughly kind, well-meaning and honourable, though a trifle too strict in their attitude to their children. MR. KENNION is, if anything, more lenient with GRACE, and MRS. KENNION with the boys.

MR. and MRS. KENNION are sitting cosily in front of the fire. MR. KENNION is in the left-hand armchair ; he is reading "The Nation," and smokes a big briar pipe. Copies of "The Daily News" and "The Salchester Guardian" lie rumpled up at his feet. MRS. KENNION is in the right-hand armchair, reading the "Strand Magazine." They read for a short time.

MR. KENNION. I haven't heard the boys come in, Alice. Have you ?

MRS. KENNION (*looking up*). No, I don't think I have, James.

MR. K. (*looking at his watch*). It's late ; after half-past ten. (*He grunts and they resume reading.*)

(MAGGIE, a bonny, well-built housemaid, enters with a letter on a salver, and looks round.)

MR. K. A letter, Maggie ?

MAGGIE. For Miss Grace, sir.

MR. K. (*rather drily*). Ah !

(MAGGIE places the letter prominently on the sideboard, leaning against a plant pot. MR. and MRS. KENNION resume their reading meanwhile, but as soon as MAGGIE has gone out and closed the door, they both turn and gaze at the letter. Then they look at each

other. MR. KENNION after a moment's hesitation gets up and goes to the sideboard and examines the letter. He takes it in his hand and then passes it to his wife, who examines the address.)

MR. K. It's the same handwriting as the other letters.

MRS. K. Yes. I ought to know it. I've seen it somewhere.

MR. K. There's no doubt it's a man's.

MRS. K. Don't you think we ought to open it, James?

MR. K. (*taking it from her*). No, no; we'd better not do that.

MRS. K. What shall you do, then?

MR. K. I shall ask Grace to show it to me.

MRS. K. Suppose she refuses.

MR. K. Then I shall make her show it to me.

MRS. K. Well, if you're going to make her show it you, you might just as well open it yourself.

MR. K. That wouldn't be quite honourable, Alice. I would never think of opening Grace's letters—unless—

MRS. K. Unless?

MR. K. Unless she refused to show them to me. (*He replaces the letter and sits down again to "The Nation."* MRS. KENNION also reads again.)

(REGGIE KENNION enters; a nice-looking, slim, irresponsible boy of 19, wearing a big overcoat and cap and carrying a hockey-bag. He flings the bag down, takes off his cap and unbuttons his coat.)

REGGIE. Hello! All alone?

MRS. K. Well, Reggie. Did you win?

REGGIE. Win? I should jolly well think so. Walked round them.

MR. K. Where's Arthur?

REGGIE. I don't know.

MRS. K. Haven't you seen him?

REGGIE. No. He's been playing on the second, at home. I've been playing at Liverpool.

MR. K. You're very late.

REGGIE. Hang it all, dad, it's only just after ten.

MR. K. It is after half-past ten, Reggie.

REGGIE. I've had to come from Liverpool.

MR. K. It doesn't take five hours to come from Liverpool.

REGGIE (*in an injured tone*). I had to get something to eat, hadn't I?

MR. K. All right, my boy, I'm not going to argue about it. (*Kindly.*) You're old enough to be trusted, but you know I don't like you to be out too late on Saturday night. I can't make out where Arthur is.

MRS. K. (*placidly*). So you had something to eat in Liverpool, Reggie. Where did you go?

REGGIE (*confused*). Oh,—er—to a—a—place.

MRS. K. I don't know why you couldn't have come straight home. I could have kept your tea for you.

MR. K. (*trying to be chatty*). Did any of the fellows go with you?

REGGIE. Only Jones, our left back. He was captain to-day.

MRS. K. Did you go to a confectioner's?

REGGIE (*slowly*). Er—no.

MRS. K. I could have told you of a very nice confectioner's.

REGGIE. No. A restaurant.

MR. K. Whereabouts?

REGGIE. Can't say. Don't know Liverpool.

MR. K. What name?

REGGIE. I forget; Jones knew it.

MR. K. A teetotal place?

REGGIE. Oh, I really don't know. What on earth does it matter?

MRS. K. Now, Reggie, don't be so bad-tempered when people ask you questions.

REGGIE. Well, you're always bothering me about

what I've been doing and where I've been. Any one would think there was something wrong in having tea in Liverpool.

(*There is an awkward pause. MR. KENNION returns to his paper. REGGIE strolls to the sideboard and looks at the letter.*)

MRS. K. (*conversationally*). Whose writing is that, Reggie?

REGGIE. Clifford Rawson's, isn't it? (*He goes to door.*)

(*MR. and MRS. KENNION look at each other meaningfully.*)

MRS. K. Now, Reggie, take those hockey things away. And your cap.

REGGIE. Oh, all right. (*He picks them up.*) I say, dad, I wanted to ask you something.

MR. K. Well, my boy?

REGGIE (*hesitatingly*). Don't you think I might chuck being secretary of the Sunday School now?

MRS. K. Reggie!

MR. K. (*amazed*). You want to give up the secretaryship? What for? Do you find the work is too hard?

REGGIE. No, but it spoils a Sunday afternoon.

MR. K. You couldn't be better employed on a Sunday afternoon.

REGGIE. Well, of course, that's a matter of opinion.

MR. K. (*good-temperedly*). Reggie, if you give up the Sunday School I shall be very grieved.

REGGIE (*grumbling*). It's enough to make a fellow want to emigrate.

MRS. K. Good gracious, Reggie!

REGGIE. I wish I could go to Canada, like Tommy Leslie.

MR. K. He went because he could do no good here.

MRS. K. And he travelled steerage.

REGGIE. I had a picture postcard from him last week, showing him milking a cow.

MRS. K. (*chaffing*). If you want to milk cows there's no need to go to Canada.

REGGIE. He's out in the fields at five every morning.

MR. K. (*also chaffing him*). That wouldn't suit you. I've hard work to get you up by half-past eight.

REGGIE. Rot! It's fine; it's a man's life.

(MR. and MRS. KENNION go on reading. A pause.)

REGGIE (*at last*). Then I've got to keep on at the Sunday School.

MR. K. You know perfectly well I don't wish you to give it up.

REGGIE (*sulkily*). I shall write and ask Tommy Leslie if he can get me a job in Canada. (*He waits for the result of this bombshell, but it has no effect. So he turns to go out.*)

MRS. K. (*still reading*). Don't forget to take your hockey-bag with you, Reggie.

(*He picks it up pettishly, and his coat and cap.*)

MR. K. (*quietly*). You're not going out again tonight, Reggie?

REGGIE. No, of course not.

(REGGIE goes out.)

MRS. K. Reggie's always talking about Canada nowadays. I hope he doesn't mean anything by it.

MR. K. Rubbish, Alice. If Reggie went to Canada we should have him whining for his passage money back in three months.

MRS. K. I can't understand what he can see in milking cows.

MR. K. He only wants to get away from the restrictions of home. It's a phase all young fellows go through; I've been through it myself.

(GRACE, a well-built, capable, handsome girl of nearly 23, comes in with a tray, which contains a coffee-jug, five cups and saucers, biscuits and butter and plates and knives, etc.)

GRACE. The boys have come in, haven't they ?

MRS. K. Only Reggie.

GRACE. Hasn't Arthur come ? How late he is.

MR. K. (*looking at his watch*). I can't understand it.

MRS. K. I think there's a letter for you there.

(GRACE puts the tray on the table and goes to the letter.
She glances at it and then tucks it in her belt, unopened.)

MRS. K. (*placidly*). Who's it from, dear ?

GRACE (*after a second's hesitation*). From Miss Baker. About the bazaar, I expect.

MR. K. (*sternly, putting down his paper*). Grace, that letter is not from Miss Baker.

GRACE (*startled*). Father !

MR. K. You know it's not, don't you ? (*She does not answer.*) Come, Grace. (*Still no reply*). Grace, will you show me that letter ?

GRACE. I don't think you've any right to insist on seeing my letters, father.

MR. K. (*kindly but firmly*). I am not insisting, Grace. I'm asking you to allow me.

GRACE. I'm twenty-two, father.

MR. K. Are you ashamed to show it me ?

(After a moment's pause GRACE quickly hands MR. KENNION the letter.)

GRACE. I'm certainly not ashamed.

MR. K. Thank you. (*He tears the envelope open.*) Remember, I'm opening this with your permission, Grace. (*She does not reply ; he glances through the letter and then reads it aloud to MRS. KENNION*) :—

“ DARLING GRACE, Just a line to tell you that I'm not going away for the week-end after all. So I will meet you after Sunday School, as usual.

“ Dearest love,

“ Your own

“ CLIFFORD.”

(There is a long pause.)

GRACE. Can I have my letter, please ?

MR. K. (*giving it her*). It is from Clifford Rawson, I suppose.

GRACE. Yes.

MR. K. Now, will you tell us, your mother and me, how it is that Clifford Rawson comes to be writing a letter like that to you?

GRACE. He wanted to let me know that he'd meet me to-morrow, I suppose.

MR. K. "As usual," he says. He has been meeting you frequently?

GRACE. Yes.

MR. K. Why?

GRACE. Well, father, if you can't understand! I suppose you used to meet mother.

MRS. K. (*with some heat*). I never met your father secretly, Grace. Especially after teaching a Sunday School class.

MR. K. You mean that young Rawson and you are fond of each other?

GRACE. Yes.

MR. K. Are you engaged?

GRACE. No, not exactly. I told Clifford he'd have to ask you first.

MR. K. I'm glad to hear that, at any rate. Well, Grace, I can understand a boy and girl being fond of each other. I can understand your being fond of young Rawson, though I haven't too good an opinion of him myself. But I cannot understand your meeting him secretly like this, and above all, your telling me a deliberate lie—a lie—about that letter.

GRACE. It's entirely your own fault, father.

MR. K. (*amazed*). My fault!

MRS. K. (*scandalized*). Grace!

GRACE. We had to keep it secret because you're so strict that you never would let me meet a boy alone.

MRS. K. I should think not, indeed.

GRACE. How can you get to know any one well enough to find out you want to be engaged to him unless you see a good deal of him first?

MR. K. (*slightly puzzled*). You've always had plenty of opportunities of meeting your brothers' friends here at home, and young men at the tennis club, and—and at the chapel.

GRACE (*quietly*). That's not quite the same thing, is it ?

(*A slight pause.*)

MR. K. (*rising*). Well, Grace, you're a woman now, and I can't treat you as I could have done two or three years ago. I shan't say any more about the way you've gone about this affair, but you've upset your mother and me very much.

(*He seems to expect an expression of regret, but GRACE doesn't speak.*)

However, that's over and we'll try and forget all about it. Then I am to understand that Clifford Rawson wants my consent to your engagement ?

GRACE. Yes.

MR. K. Now I don't promise to give it, you understand.

(*GRACE looks mutinous, as if she will do without it.*)
I shall have to think about it, and talk it over with your mother. And I must speak to Arthur about Clifford ; I must know a great deal more about him than I do at present.

MRS. K. You must see him at once, James.

MR. K. Certainly ; I shall write to-night and ask him to come and see me to-morrow.

GRACE. Will you let me write and ask him, father ?

MR. K. You ? Very well, if you prefer.

GRACE. I do. (*She goes to the door.*) What time to-morrow ?

MR. K. In the afternoon.

GRACE. I'll write at once. (*GRACE goes out.*)

MRS. K. James ! Who would have believed it ?

MR. K. I'm sorry to find that Grace has been

deceiving us ; but we must be very thankful it's no worse.

MRS. K. You must make inquiries about Clifford.

MR. K. I shall ask Arthur. He's a friend of Clifford's, and I shall be guided to a great extent by his opinion of his character.

MRS. K. The great thing is to find out whether he's steady. I *have* heard that he comes home very late sometimes.

MR. K. Arthur will know. We must rely on him.

MRS. K. Where *is* Arthur ; he's not come in yet ?

MR. K. I hope there's not been an accident.

(MAGGIE *comes in.*)

MAGGIE. If you please, sir, there's a gentleman to see you.

MR. K. Who is it ?

MAGGIE. He wouldn't give his name, sir. He's in the hall.

(MR. KENNION *goes out puzzled, followed by MAGGIE. His voice is almost immediately heard in the hall, raised in joyous surprise.*)

MR. K. Tom ! Why, good gracious, it's Tom !

(MRS. KENNION, who has been listening, rises from her chair, as MR. KENNION, like a schoolboy, reappears dragging in THOMAS KENNION by the hand. THOMAS is a stouter, more genial edition of his brother.)

MR. K. Alice, look who's turned up.

MRS. K. Tom ! Well, this *is* a surprise.

TOM. Yes, I meant it to be. (*He greets MRS. KENNION heartily.*) I had to come across to London on business, and I wasn't sure whether I should have time to get down here to see you, so I didn't write.

MR. K. It's five years, Tom, since we saw you last.

TOM. Yes. Time flies, doesn't it ?

MRS. K. It's too bad of you not to come over oftener. It isn't very far from Hamburg to here.

TOM. It's no further from here to Hamburg. Why don't you come and see me, Jim, you lazy beggar?

MR. K. I've been intending to for years.

TOM. And how are you all?

MRS. K. Splendid.

TOM. The children?

MR. K. Tut, tut; they are grown up, you forget.

TOM. By gad, so they are.

MR. K. There's only Reggie still under 21; and you'd never guess it from his behaviour.

MRS. K. You'd like a bit of supper, Tom, I dare say.

TOM. No thanks, I had dinner in the train.

MRS. K. Coffee, then?

TOM. If it's not troubling you——

MRS. K. Oh, it's ready here. (MRS. KENNION *pours two cups of coffee.*) We always enjoy a cup of coffee in the evening.

MR. K. What will you smoke, Tom?

TOM. I'll try some of your tobacco, thanks, Jim.
(MR. KENNION *hands his pouch and TOM fills his pipe.*)

MRS. K. Do you like a feather mattress?

TOM. What for?

MRS. K. To sleep on, of course. I must go and see about your room.

TOM. Don't you trouble. Sleep in the bath if necessary.

MRS. K. It isn't necessary. We have a spare bedroom.

(MRS. KENNION *goes out smiling.*)

TOM (*sitting in the left armchair*). I should like to go round to-night and see mother for a few minutes, if it's not too late.

MR. K. Not at all. She never goes to bed till eleven. A wonderful old woman, Tom,

TOM. Seventy-five last birthday, wasn't she ?

MR. K. Seventy-six.

TOM. And she writes to me regularly, once a month.

MR. K. She keeps you well posted up in what's going on here ?

TOM. Yes. There's always a bit about you, and a bit about herself and a good deal about the chapel.

MR. K. She goes to service morning and evening on Sundays. She even kept her Bible Class on until last year.

TOM. Amazing ! Still I can't help feeling that she seems to regard the chapel as the hub of the universe.

MR. K. It is the principal interest in her life.

TOM. Curious how one gets rid of that point of view living abroad.

MR. K. (*smiling*). That was mother's chief objection to your going abroad at first. Do you remember ?

TOM. Rather. We had a bit of a tussle over it, hadn't we ? Even now I suspect she thinks of Germany as an ungodly place inhabited by rather light-minded people.

MR. K. Well, Tom, you know, we can't exactly approve of the way they spend Sunday in Germany,

TOM (*laughing heartily*). The Continental Sunday, eh ? Ha, ha !

MR. K. (*gravely*). I think the English way is best, Tom.

TOM. Yes, and you think old England's the finest country in the world, and that Salchester, dirty old Salchester, the most beautiful city in England, and that the chapel's the noblest institution in Salchester.

MR. K. (*very seriously*). Well, Tom, if I do—

TOM (*heartily*). Don't apologise for it. That's the spirit that has made England what it is.

MR. K. (*pleased*). Do you really think so ?

TOM (*seriously*). I do. Thank God I haven't got it.

(Enter REGGIE very sedately.)

REGGIE. How do you do, Uncle Tom ?

TOM. Hello, young man. (Shaking hands.) It's Arthur, isn't it ?

REGGIE (*pleased*). No, I'm Reggie. I'm not surprised at your mistake ; lots of people think I look older than Arthur.

TOM. Reggie, of course ! And where's Arthur ?

REGGIE. Not come in yet.

MR. K. I can't make out where he's got to. It's so late.

TOM. Late ? Why it isn't eleven yet. Your hotels and places don't close till eleven, do they ?

MR. K. (in amazement). Hotels ? Why ?

TOM. Thought he might be having a drink somewhere, that's all.

MR. K. (after a pause). I should be very sorry to think that either Arthur or Reggie was in the habit of frequenting hotels.

TOM (*surprised*). Why, what's wrong with them ?

MR. K. Wrong with them ! Wrong with hotels ! Er—well, I suppose there's nothing wrong with them if they are properly conducted ; but you forget that Arthur and Reggie are only boys.

REGGIE. I say, father. I shall be twenty-one in less than two years.

TOM. You're in a bank, aren't you, Reggie ?

REGGIE. Yes.

TOM (to MR. KENNION.) And Arthur's still with you at the warehouse ?

MR. K. Yes.

TOM. And how do you like the bank, Reggie ?

REGGIE. Rotten.

TOM. How's that ?

REGGIE. Oh, there's no romance about it.

TOM. After all, there isn't intended to be.

REGGIE. What I want is a *man's life*.

TOM. What do you call "a man's life"?

REGGIE (*airily*). Oh, you know. Riding round on a horse and ordering people about.

TOM. You find it slow in the bank?

REGGIE. Slow's not the word. And what chance has a fellow of getting on?

MR. K. You've the chance of becoming a bank manager in time.

REGGIE. A bank manager! Now I ask you, Uncle Tom, what is a bank manager?

TOM. A man who manages a bank, I suppose.

REGGIE. I mean what *sort* of a man? Why, a fat, bald, old beggar with side whiskers. A chap who couldn't kill a grizzly bear to save his life. Couldn't run away from one even. I tell you I'm sick of Salchester. You don't think you could find me a place in Hamburg, uncle?

TOM. I'm afraid even Hamburg wouldn't be exciting enough to suit your requirements.

(MRS. KENNION enters followed by GRACE.)

MRS. K. Tom, here's Grace.

TOM (*rising*). How d'you do, my dear. Too big to kiss?

GRACE (*smiling*). No, uncle. (*She offers him her cheek, which he kisses.*) How jolly of you to turn up like this.

TOM (*holding her left hand and examining the third finger*). Not engaged yet, I see.

GRACE. No.

MR. K. Er, no.

(*An awkward pause. GRACE looks at her father.*)

TOM. You must hurry up, my dear.

GRACE (*looking at MR. KENNION*). I've sent that letter to the post.

MR. K. Very well.

MRS. K. But wherever is Arthur?

REGGIE. Perhaps he's at Clifford Rawson's.

MR. K. You'd better go round and see, if he doesn't turn up soon.

(MAGGIE comes in.)

MAGGIE. Please, sir, Mr. Leadbitter and Mr. Fowle would like to have a word with you, if it isn't too late.

MR. K. Leadbitter and Fowle. Certainly. Ask them to come in.

TOM. Look here, I'll slip round to see mother now.

MR. K. Very well; it's only round the corner; she's moved you know.

GRACE. Reggie and I will go with you, uncle, and show you the way.

TOM. Right you are.

(MAGGIE shows in MR. LEADBITTER, a thin, ascetic, doctrinaire person; and MR. FOWLE, a stout, fleshy, rubicund man.)

MR. K. (shaking hands with them). How do you do?

MR. LEAD. Good-evening, Mrs. Kennion.

MR. FOWLE (genially). Hope we don't intrude so late.

MRS. K. Not at all.

MR. K. Let me introduce my brother from Germany, Mr. Thomas Kennion; Mr. Leadbitter and Mr. Fowle.

MR. LEAD. (shaking hands). Very pleased to meet you, sir.

MR. FOWLE (jovially). Tom Kennion! (Taking his hand.) I remember giving you a black eye when we were at the Grammar School together.

TOM. I think it was I who gave you the black eye.

MR. FOWLE. Was it? Perhaps you're right. I forgot.

MR. LEAD. We just wanted to have a word with you, Kennion.

TOM. I'm off. Come along, Grace, Reggie.

MR. FOWLE. We're not driving you away?

TOM. Not at all ; going round to my mother's. We shall be back before you've gone, I daresay.

(GRACE, REGGIE and TOM go out.)

MRS. K. You want to have a talk with James, I suppose ?

MR. LEAD. Only for a moment.

MRS. K. (*suddenly afraid*). It's nothing about Arthur ?

MR. LEAD. Arthur ? No ; why ?

MRS. K. (*relieved*). I thought there might have been an accident, that's all. (*She goes out.*)

MR. K. (*indicating the armchairs*). Now then, sit down.

(*He unlocks the sideboard cupboard with a key on his ring, and produces a box of cigars, a bottle of whisky, a syphon of soda and a glass.*)

MR. K. (*offering cigars*). Cigar ?

MR. LEAD. Thanks.

MR. FOWLE. I don't mind if I do.

MR. K. You're a teetotaler, Leadbitter ?

MR. LEAD. Entirely.

MR. FOWLE. So are you, Kennion, aren't you ?

MR. K. Yes ; but I keep a drop for my friends.

MR. FOWLE (*seeing the whisky*). Aha ! That's the right spirit.

MR. K. Help yourself, Fowle.

MR. FOWLE. I don't mind if I do. (*He mixes a stiff whisky and soda and returns with it to his chair.*) MR. KENNION turns round one of the chairs which are pushed under the dining-table and sits on it, between the armchairs, facing the fire.

MR. LEAD. What did your wife mean about Arthur ?

MR. K. He's not come in yet. And she's a bit anxious, as it's getting late.

MR. FOWLE. Late ! You should see the time my

lad Alan comes home. One or two in the morning sometimes. I pretend not to notice anything, but of course I've a pretty good idea what he's been up to.

MR. K. (*amazed*). But why do you allow it?

MR. FOWLE. Why not? Boys will be boys; that's only natural, you know. Besides, I've been young myself.

MR. K. Surely it's a father's duty to—

MR. FOWLE (*interrupting*). To keep his eyes shut.

MR. K. I hold stricter views.

MR. LEAD. Of course you do, my dear Kennion. So do I. Your views are unimpeachable; and it is for that reason that you find us here to-night.

MR. K. (*looking from one to the other*). I don't understand.

MR. LEAD. You are probably surprised to see us at this unearthly hour. We are on our way home from a meeting of the Council of the Liberal Association, where a decision has been arrived at that Fowle and I thought it advisable to acquaint you with immediately.

MR. FOWLE. Admirably put, old chap, but a little formal. Kennion isn't a public meeting, you know.

MR. LEAD (*piqued*). Ask him yourself then.

MR. FOWLE. To cut matters short, we want to adopt you as Liberal Candidate for Longton Park Ward at the City Council Elections in November.

MR. K. Me? (*He rises*.) Gentlemen! My dear Leadbitter,—my dear Fowle! (*He sits again*.) I am overwhelmed.

MR. FOWLE. Never mind that; will you stand?

MR. K. Will I stand? (*He rises again mechanically*). Upon my word, I don't know what to say. I shall have to think about it; to talk it over with my wife. But believe me, I appreciate the honour—immensely.

MR. LEAD. We should like to have your decision not later than Monday evening.

MR. K. But why do you ask me? To win the

seat from Grignall we shall need a very strong man indeed.

MR. LEAD. We are of opinion that you *are* a strong man, Kennion.

MR. FOWLE. You see it's like this. The Nonconformist element is damn powerful in this ward. Now you're a big gun at your chapel and that'll rake in a lot of votes. I'm a Churchman myself, but I see that without the Nonconformist vote the Liberal Party here would be in the soup. Then Grignall's a brewer and you're a teetotaler ; if we work it properly—temperance reform and social purity and all that game—we shall detach some of the temperance Conservatives.

MR. K. Are there any temperance Conservatives ?

MR. LEAD. In Municipal Elections, yes. Not in Parliamentary Elections.

MR. FOWLE. Down with the publican ; down with the brewer. That's the line we want to take. Good health ! (*He drinks.*)

MR. LEAD. Yes. Emphasize the fact that drunkenness is the cause of poverty.

MR. K. (*timidly*). But some people say that poverty is the cause of drunkenness, don't they ?

MR. LEAD. We can afford to ignore them ; it's only Socialists who say that.

MR. FOWLE. Besides, hang it all what does it matter what we say ? Between ourselves—all friends here—what we care about is knocking Grignall out, not about reforming social conditions.

MR. LEAD. I don't altogether agree with you, Fowle.

MR. K. I don't agree with you at all. I *do* care about improving the condition of the poor and helping them to keep out of temptation. If I'm to be your candidate that must be understood.

MR. LEAD. By all means.

MR. FOWLE. All the better. If you're so much in earnest you'll be all the stronger as a candidate. There's no harm at all in meaning what you say.

MR. LEAD. The people who don't mean what they say are the bane of politics.

MR. FOWLE. Now, don't be so sweeping, Leadbitter. (*Rising to get some more whisky.*) Well, I think it's a damn good wheeze putting you up, Kennion. You're not too intellectual, like Leadbitter here ; you're the sort of honest, straightforward man that electors take to at meetings. It's my own idea ; you've got me to thank for it. Good health. (*He drinks.*)

MR. K. I'm very much obliged to you and Leadbitter and all of you. If I accept your invitation——

MR. FOWLE. You've got to.

MR. K. Well, I don't think there's much doubt—you may rely on my putting up the best fight I can for you.

MR. LEAD. I'm sure you will.

MR. FOWLE. Good luck to Councillor Kennion !
(*He drinks the toast, as Mrs. KENNION enters.*)

MRS. K. What *are* you talking about, Mr. Fowle ?

MR. K. They want me to stand for the City Council, my dear.

MRS. K. (*excitedly*). Oh, James ! How splendid ! You will, won't you ?

MR. FOWLE. There you are, Kennion. She's settled it for you.

MR. K. I don't see why not.

(TOM KENNION enters with GRACE and REGGIE.)

TOM. Hello, what's the excitement ?

MRS. K. Tom, what do you think ?

MR. K. Hush, hush, Alice.

MRS. K. I *must* tell them. James is going to put up for the Council.

TOM. Bravo !

REGGIE. Hooray !!

MR. K. You mustn't go just yet, you two. Sit down again.

MR. LEAD. It is late—

MR. K. Never mind, once in a way.

(They pull out chairs, and form a big circle round the fire ; the men smoking.)

TOM. Now then, Jim ; what about music in the parks on Sunday. No voting against that, I hope.

MR. K. (with warmth). I defend music in the parks. It keeps people out of the public houses.

TOM. You might say that of bull-fighting or football.

REGGIE. I don't see why there shouldn't be Sunday football.

MR. K. There are many things you don't see yet, my son.

MRS. K. Fancy you a Councillor, James.

MR. FOWLE. It may not stop at that.

TOM. Alderman !

MR. LEAD. Lord Mayor !

MRS. K. A knighthood !

MR. FOWLE. And you'd be Lady Mayoress, Mrs. Kennion.

MRS. K. So I should.

TOM. That may not be the end of it. Member of Parliament perhaps.

MRS. K. James !

TOM. The Cabinet ; a peerage ! Think of Chamberlain.

REGGIE (coolly). Aren't you all a little previous. Father may not be elected at all.

MR. K. Of course. We're all talking nonsense, we know that. But it's very pleasant to be sitting here round the fire talking nonsense for once in a way.

TOM. Wait till you're in the Council. You'll be able to talk it as much as you like then.

MRS. K. Won't grandma be surprised ; and Arthur ?

MR. K. By the way, where is Arthur ? (Looks at his watch.) Half-past eleven !

MRS. K. He's never been so late before.

REGGIE. Hist ! Some one now !

(They all become absolutely silent and listen. A slight scuffling noise is heard in the hall, and then MAGGIE'S voice, distinctly) :—

MAGGIE. Now, do behave yourself, will you ?

(The noise is repeated.)

Go straight upstairs to bed, now. Do, for goodness sake !

(After another slight scuffle the door is swung open violently, and ARTHUR KENNION, a handsome tall boy of twenty-one, with a strong face, appears hanging on to the handle. He is completely and benignantly drunk. He smiles round on the assembly and with an erratic wave of his hand says, "Hello !" MAGGIE hovers in the background. The curtain falls in a complete silence of horror.)

ACT II.

The same room early the following morning. Breakfast is laid for six; a cold tongue is on the table; but nothing hot, for no one is down yet.

(MR. KENNION dressed in his Sunday best, except that he wears a comfortable house-jacket in place of his frock-coat, enters the room briskly, looks round, goes to the bell and rings. MAGGIE enters after a moment.)

MR. KENNION. Breakfast ready, Maggie?

MAGGIE. Yes, sir.

(MAGGIE goes out, and MR. KENNION takes a small piece of paper from his pocket, studies it and places it beside his plate on the table. The gong in the hall is rung loudly. GRACE enters.)

GRACE. Good-morning, father.

MR. K. Good-morning, Grace. (They meet in front of the fire, and MR. KENNION kisses her.)

GRACE. How is mother?

MR. K. Had rather a bad night. She isn't coming down for breakfast.

GRACE (sorry). Oh!

MR. K. No. She's still too upset to come down. Will you let Maggie take breakfast to her room? See to it yourself, dear, see that it's nice.

GRACE. I'll go now.

(GRACE goes out just as MAGGIE with the tray enters. MAGGIE sets a dish of bacon and eggs at one end of the table and a big coffee-pot at the other. Toast also she brings.)

MR. K. Ah, here we are. (*He sits down at the left-hand end of the table.*)

Just pour out my coffee, Maggie.

MAGGIE. Miss Grace is down, sir.

MR. K. I know ; she's seeing after your mistress's breakfast.

MAGGIE. Yes, sir. (*MAGGIE pours out a cup of coffee.*)

(MR. KENNION *helps himself to bacon and eggs and begins breakfast.*)

MR. K. While I have the opportunity, I should like to tell you how sorry I am for what happened last night.

MAGGIE. What happened last night ? (*She looks puzzled.*)

MR. K. For what Mr. Arthur did.

MAGGIE (*passing the cup*). What Mr. Arthur did, sir ?

MR. K. (*irritably*). Come, come ; what *did* Mr. Arthur do ?

MAGGIE (*tolerantly*). Oh nothing, sir.

MR. K. Nothing ?

MAGGIE. Nothing to speak of.

MR. K. But I distinctly heard you say, " Now, do behave yourself."

MAGGIE (*reluctantly*). Perhaps I did, sir.

MR. K. What did you say that for, if he wasn't doing anything ?

MAGGIE. Well, of course, he was trying to kiss me, sir.

MR. K. Ah, that is what I thought. Maggie, I am deeply shocked. It is the first time a woman has ever been insulted under my roof. I will see that Mr. Arthur apologizes to you, at once.

MAGGIE. Oh, sir, I shouldn't like him to do that.

MR. K. No self-respecting girl could be content with anything less.

MAGGIE. You see, sir, Mr. Arthur was a little jolly last night ; and after all, he only offered to kiss me.

MR. K. Good gracious, isn't that bad enough.

MAGGIE. Believe me, sir. I don't mind it at all.

MR. K. (*warmly*). Don't mind it ! But you've got to mind it, girl.

MAGGIE. I'd much rather you'd let it rest.

MR. K. Not on any account. It's a matter of principle with me. Mr. Arthur has got to apologize to you, before everybody.

MAGGIE. I couldn't listen to him, sir.

MR. K. But I shall insist on your listening.

MAGGIE (*on the verge of tears*). Oh, sir. Don't humiliate me before everybody.

MR. K. (*thoroughly aggravated*). Don't you see, girl, that you *have* been humiliated before everybody, and that's why I insist upon this apology having the same publicity.

MAGGIE (*obstinately*). No, sir.

MR. K. Don't argue with me about it, Maggie. I am your master, and you will have to do what I tell you.

MAGGIE. I'd rather leave first, sir.

MR. K. Don't talk nonsense.

MAGGIE. I don't mind being kissed by any one, even by you, sir ; but when it comes to being apologized to before everybody, just as if I'd done something wrong. . . .

MR. K. (*throwing himself back in his chair angrily*. Tchah !

MAGGIE. I'd rather give you notice now, sir.

MR. K. (*quite rudely*). Very well, give me notice, then. (*She is going out when he speaks sharply*). Tell Miss Grace her breakfast's getting cold.

MAGGIE. Yes, sir. (*She goes out. MR. KENNION eats his breakfast in a perturbed way, and taking up the piece of paper from the table studies it irritably*.)

(GRACE comes in.)

MR. K. Bacon, Grace ?

GRACE. I'll have some tongue, thanks.

(MR. KENNION cuts and passes the tongue and GRACE pours herself some coffee. She sits opposite MR. KENNION at the right hand end of the table.)

MR. K. Maggie has just given me notice.

GRACE. Maggie ? Oh, after last night, I suppose.

MR. K. Not exactly. She prefers to go rather than receive a public apology from Arthur.

GRACE (after a pause). But if she doesn't want an apology——

MR. K. I want her to have one. Not so much for her sake, mind, as Arthur's. It will be good discipline for him.

GRACE. Did you say anything to Arthur last night ?

MR. K. I found it impossible last night. At first he persisted in trying to shake hands with me, and after that he became violently—er—ill. I am very much upset about this, Grace. I've been awake most of the night thinking it over. I'm thankful your grandmother wasn't here ; I think it would have killed her. The most unfortunate part of the whole business was Leadbitter and Fowle seeing it all.

GRACE. I don't suppose Mr. Fowle would be very shocked. He's used to that sort of thing with his son Alan.

MR. K. That's it ! I'd just let Fowle see distinctly what I thought of his way of managing his boy ; and then, on top of that, Arthur comes in in this condition. Disgusting !

(GRACE can hardly repress a smile.)

Then, of course, there was Mr. Leadbitter. He must have been terribly shocked ; a very strong teetotaler.

GRACE. It can't be helped now, father ; after all, it doesn't matter as much as it would if they went to the chapel.

MR. K. But don't you see they've asked me to stand for the Council just because of my views on the drink question ? And now, after that—oh, it's most ignominious !

GRACE. I dare say they'll keep quiet about it.

MR. K. Of course they'll keep quiet about it if they are running me as a temperance candidate. But that doesn't alter the fact that I can't command their respect as I did. What do you think Fowle had the impertinence to say as he was going ? He dug me in the ribs and said, "Never mind, old chap, you'll soon get used to it." And I couldn't even answer him back.

GRACE. Some more coffee, father ?

MR. K. No, thank you. I'll have some marmalade. Then of course, Grace, this business makes it awkward for me to meet Clifford Rawson this afternoon. I wish he weren't coming to-day.

GRACE. Why ?

MR. K. Because I intended to talk to Arthur about him ; to ask him if Clifford is steady. Now, of course, I should not be inclined to place much reliance in Arthur's opinion.

GRACE. It's very unfair to mix Clifford up with this.

MR. K. I'm not doing, my dear. Though now I come to think of it I shouldn't be surprised if Clifford *had* been mixed up in it.

GRACE. Father !

MR. K. He is a great friend of Arthur's. I shall certainly ask Clifford what *he* was doing last night.

GRACE. It is very unkind of you to be so prejudiced against him.

MR. K. If he is innocent he will have no difficulty in telling me what he was doing. I am not going to let you be engaged to him until I have made the fullest inquiries. It's not surprising that I should be suspicious when I find out that my own three children have been deceiving me,

GRACE. I thought you weren't going to say any more about that, father.

MR. K. No, I won't. But there's Arthur as well ; and now, I may inform you, Reggie.

GRACE. What has Reggie been doing ?

MR. K. You will know in good time. Just ring that gong again.

(GRACE goes into the hall and bangs the gong very loudly and long. MR. KENNION fills his pipe, still at the table, though he has now finished breakfast.)

MR. K. That's enough, Grace !

GRACE (returning). I expect they're all asleep.

MR. K. You'd better have this bacon sent out to keep warm for your uncle.

(GRACE rings the bell.)

By the way, you won't be going to Sunday School this afternoon, Grace, if Clifford is coming ?

GRACE. I think not.

MR. K. No. Better not.

(REGGIE enters, buttoning up his waistcoat.)

REGGIE. Morning, everybody. (Goes to table.) I say, this bacon's cold.

MR. K. That's your fault.

REGGIE. I'll have some tongue.

(MR. KENNION cuts tongue for REGGIE. MAGGIE enters.)

GRACE. Take the bacon and eggs and keep it warm till I ring.

(MAGGIE takes the dish and goes out.)

MR. K. You're very late, sir.

REGGIE (sitting, facing the fire, on the chair nearer to GRACE). The gong's only just gone.

MR. K. For the second time.

REGGIE. I didn't hear it. (GRACE gives REGGIE coffee.) I'm jolly hungry.

MR. K. (*dangerously civil*). Didn't you have a good meal last night at that teetotal restaurant that you've forgotten the name of?

REGGIE (*looking at him curiously*). Yes. Pretty fair.

MR. K. (*quietly*). After I locked up last night I found a paper on the hall floor, underneath the peg on which your overcoat was hung up, it had evidently fallen out of the pocket.

(REGGIE *stares at MR. KENNION*.)

It was a bill with the heading *Hornet Hotel, Liverpool*.

(REGGIE *noiselessly ejaculates "Damn."*)
I have it here. I'll read it. "Two sherry and bitters, one shilling. Two table d'hôte dinners at half a crown, five shillings. One flask of Chianti, No. 74, three and sixpence. Coffees, eightpence. Liqueurs, one shilling. Cigars, one shilling. Total for two persons, nine shillings and eightpence."

(*He lays the bill down and looks at REGGIE, who has been eating stolidly with his eyes on the plate.*)

REGGIE. I don't see that you ought to read my private papers.

MR. K. It is yours then? I thought so, since you were the only member of the family at Liverpool yesterday. Now I ask you whether you don't consider it an extravagance to pay—how much—er, nine and eightpence—

REGGIE. More.

MR. K. More?

REGGIE. Gave the waiter a bob.

MR. K. Gave the waiter a bob. Of course; in your position you would do. Ten and eightpence for a meal for two persons. Five and fourpence each!

REGGIE. It's not out of the way for dinner.

MR. K. You could have got a very good meat tea for a shilling.

REGGIE. I don't like meat teas.

MR. K. You're accustomed to them at home.

REGGIE. That's no reason why I should go looking for them when I'm away.

MR. K. I don't know what the younger generation is coming to. Do you know that the money you two boys spent on one dinner would have kept a working man and his family for a whole week?

REGGIE. Well, I dare say the money some people spend on one dinner would keep a working man and his family for a whole year.

MR. K. But it's not so much the extravagance. It's that you should deliberately go to an hotel, and drink wine! Wine, a boy of your age! And worst of all, that you should come home and lie about it.

REGGIE. You're so unreasonable. It's better to keep some things from you.

MR. K. Be quiet, sir. Grace tells me an untruth, then you come in and do the same. The only good thing about Arthur's affair is that he didn't tell a lie about it.

REGGIE. That wasn't his fault. He wasn't in a position to. There's no knowing what he'd have done if he'd been sober.

MR. K. I am hoping that this wretched business of Arthur's may be a lesson to you; and that is why I am not going to say much more. (*He rises and speaks with some emotion.*) You are approaching the critical years of your life, when you will form habits and friendships that will determine what sort of a man you will be. I pray that you will grow up a good man, Reggie, a Christian man; and it is my duty to watch over you to the best of my ability.

(*A pause. MR. KENNION is slightly moved; and REGGIE is slightly ashamed and cannot say anything.*)

GRACE. If you're going up to mother, ask her if she wants any more toast, father.

MR. K. (*recalled to earth*). Eh! Er—yes, I will.

(MR. KENNION goes out.)

REGGIE (*grumbling*). I wish father wouldn't pray over me. It's taking a mean advantage of a fellow. I can't answer him back like I can when he's angry.

GRACE. I suppose it makes you feel ashamed of yourself.

REGGIE. All right; *you* don't need to take up such a high and mighty attitude. You've been doing something wrong yourself, it appears.

(GRACE *haughtily rises from the table without answering and sits in the left-hand armchair before the fire*.)

I suppose he's caught you messing about with Clifford Rawson, and you've been telling fibs about it.

GRACE. Will you please mind your own business, Reggie?

REGGIE. I'm not blaming you. We're all in the same boat it seems. We've simply got to tell fibs to father, because he thinks that we're always trying to do something wrong. He's got it into his head that we want to bolt down the broad road that leads to destruction, and he spends his time dragging us back into the narrow path. As if a man can't have a little dinner with a pal without all this fuss. Strikes me the narrow path's for people with narrow minds.

GRACE. It really is simply awful now we've all grown up. At least, now Arthur and I are grown up.

REGGIE. Thank you, I'm nearly twenty myself. Wait till I'm twenty-one; I'll show you how to manage father, then. In a way I rather admire Arthur for breaking out like this. Though of course he was a fool to come home while he was in that state. He ought to have gone for a long walk. I know I should.

GRACE. Father's terribly upset about it. There'll be an awful row.

REGGIE. He's not talked to Arthur yet?

GRACE. No.

REGGIE. Saving it up, I suppose. He thinks it more Christian to be angry in cold blood. Personally I think it shows a nasty spirit.

(*The door opens slowly and ARTHUR comes in. He stops and looks round the room. He is subdued but not sheepish.*)

REGGIE. It's all right. Father's not here.

ARTHUR (*casting a crushing look at REGGIE*). Breakfast ready, Grace ?

REGGIE. It was ready about two hours ago. (*Imitating MR. KENNION.*) Late again, sir. I don't like it on a Sunday morning.

ARTHUR (*ignoring him*). You might pour me some coffee,. Grace.

REGGIE. But I dare say you had a bad night.

(*ARTHUR sits at table with his back to the fire. GRACE pours out coffee.*)

REGGIE. How's your head this morning ?

ARTHUR (*dangerously*). Shut up.

GRACE. What are you going to have ?

ARTHUR. What is there ?

GRACE. Some tongue there.

(*ARTHUR draws the tongue towards him and contemplates it.*)

Or there's some bacon and eggs in the kitchen.

ARTHUR (*with a shudder*). Bacon and eggs ! Ugh ! (*He gets up.*) I don't think I'll have anything. (*He sits in the right-hand armchair.*)

REGGIE (*eyeing him sympathetically*). What you want is a brandy and soda.

ARTHUR. Isn't father up yet ?

GRACE. Yes ; long ago. And not in a very good temper. Maggie has just given him notice to leave.

ARTHUR (*guiltily*). Maggie ?

REGGIE. Because of what took place between her and Arthur last night ?

GRACE. No ; I understand it's because of what took place between her and father this morning.

ARTHUR. Hello ?

REGGIE. I say, what's the dad been up to ?

GRACE. Don't be absurd. He says Arthur has got to apologize to her before every one, and she doesn't want him to.

ARTHUR. I don't mind apologizing to Maggie if I behaved like a cad, but I'm not going to have it made into a public ceremony.

REGGIE. You shouldn't have made a public ceremony of kissing her then. You might have waited until Uncle Tom had gone.

ARTHUR. What ! Was Uncle Tom here ?

REGGIE. Didn't you notice a stranger ?

ARTHUR. I thought I saw several. Was it only Uncle Tom ?

REGGIE. No, you were not deceived. There *were* others. You chose a night when there was quite a nice little reception on.

ARTHUR. Who were they ?

GRACE. Mr. Leadbitter and Mr. Fowle, come to ask father to put up for the City Council.

ARTHUR (*groaning and sinking into his chair*). Oh ! my goodness.

REGGIE (*lighting a cigarette*). Yes. There'll be a holy row. I wonder what father will say to you.

ARTHUR. I'm thinking about what I shall say to father.

REGGIE. Shouldn't say anything. You'll only make things worse.

ARTHUR. Never mind that.

REGGIE. Besides, he won't let you get a word in edgeways. He's too fond of talking. I expect he'll pray over you.

ARTHUR. He'll have to listen to me. I'm going

to have some alterations in this house. That affair last night was only the beginning.

REGGIE. Do you mean you're going to get drunk every night?

ARTHUR. Don't talk rot. I mean that he's got to treat me differently. I'm going to have more freedom.

REGGIE. Oh! While you're about it you might put in a word for us; eh, Grace?

GRACE. I quite agree with Arthur. We ought to have more freedom.

ARTHUR. I'm going to tell him so.

REGGIE. Quite right. If things are to go on as they do at present, I shan't stand it. I shall go to Australia.

GRACE. I thought it was Canada.

REGGIE. No, on second thoughts, Australia. It's further away.

(TOM KENNION comes in.)

TOM. Sorry I'm so shockingly late. Good-morning, Grace. Morning, Reggie. (*He shakes hands with them.*) And this is Arthur, isn't it? I've seen you, but you've not seen me. Good-morning, Arthur.

(*He shakes hands heartily with ARTHUR.*)

ARTHUR. Good-morning, Uncle Tom.

GRACE. Sit here, uncle. (*TOM sits in the seat on the left of Reggie, facing the fire.*) Ring the bell, Arthur. (*ARTHUR rings the bell.*) Do you like tea or coffee?

TOM. Tea, if it's all the same to you. I can't get decent tea in Hamburg.

REGGIE. It's getting late. I must go and shave.

TOM. Why, I thought you had shaved (*looking at his chin*).

REGGIE. No, I shave after breakfast on Sunday.

(*REGGIE gets up and goes out. MAGGIE comes in with bacon and eggs and a small teapot.*)

GRACE. Will you make some tea quickly, Maggie?

MAGGIE. I've brought you some, miss. I thought the coffee would be cold.

GRACE. That's right. (MAGGIE goes out.)

(TOM helps himself to bacon and GRACE gives him tea.)

TOM. I'll help myself. There's not much time to lose. I suppose you're all off to chapel?

GRACE. Oh, yes. You'll come too?

TOM. I suppose so.

GRACE. I must go and get ready, if you'll excuse me. Grandmamma will be here soon.

TOM. On her way to chapel?

GRACE. Yes. She always goes with us.

(GRACE goes out.)

TOM (*after a pause*). Feeling better this morning?

ARTHUR. Yes, thanks.

TOM. You'd been having a lively time last night, young man.

ARTHUR. I suppose you despise me for it?

TOM. Not in the least.

ARTHUR. What would you say if I told you I'd never been drunk before?

TOM. I should be very much surprised.

ARTHUR. It's the truth. Don't you believe me?

TOM. Of course I do, if you say so.

ARTHUR. It's the first time in my life I've ever been drunk.

TOM. Never mind; it won't be the last.

ARTHUR (*thoughtfully*). I don't suppose it will. There's a good deal to be said for getting drunk occasionally.

TOM. I quite agree with you.

ARTHUR. By Jove, you *are* different from father.

TOM. You don't get on with your father?

ARTHUR. No. At least, not very well in some things. I should get on all right if he'd only let me alone a bit more.

TOM. Do you expect him to have any greater confidence in you after last night?

ARTHUR. Good gracious! father's never *stopped* me from doing anything I wanted to. A fellow can find ways to do things, however suspicious his father may be. Only, of course, I'm obliged to do them in an underhand, secret way, and that's what I object to. I don't want to tell lies and deceive father; but when he thinks it's a deadly sin to drink a glass of beer or to go to a music hall, what else can I do?

TOM. You can tell him straight out that you intend to have your glass of beer and your music hall.

ARTHUR. I can now, but I couldn't before I was twenty-one. It means a row, you know.

TOM. Never mind that.

ARTHUR. Then of course I've always tried to spare his feelings and save him worrying himself. Where ignorance is bliss 'tis folly to be wise; and if he'd known I went to music halls he'd have thought I was going straight to hell.

TOM. Very considerate and thoughtful of you. All the same, have it out with him. It'll do you both good.

ARTHUR. I'm going to. That affair of mine last night was a sort of symbol of revolt; throwing down the glove, as it were.

TOM. I see; but was there any need to throw it down quite so violently? (TOM rises, having finished breakfast.)

ARTHUR. Perhaps not; but I had my reasons for doing it that way. (TOM sits in the left-hand armchair and lights his pipe.) You know, Uncle Tom, I like you immensely. It's surprising how different your views are from father's.

TOM. We've lived our lives in different places.

ARTHUR. You were both brought up together.

TOM. Yes, but I soon got away from Salchester and all its narrowness and bigotry, whilst your father

has lived here all the time. That's the difference between us.

ARTHUR. Why did you leave home?

TOM. Couldn't stand it any longer. When I was a boy I was rather like you are now.

ARTHUR (*interested*). Really?

TOM. I felt just like you do, probably, only I was worse off. My parents were much stricter than yours are.

ARTHUR. Impossible.

TOM. Yes, they were. Just think of what my mother—your grandmother—is even now.

ARTHUR. She's pretty awful, isn't she?

TOM. All of our set were like that in those days. It was understood that you were to have a good time in the next world provided you were miserable in this one. Well, as I say, I couldn't stand it. I quarrelled with your grandfather, and cleared out. First I got a place with a firm in London, and after that I went to Hamburg as their agent, and I've never regretted it. If I'd have stayed at home I daresay this place would have been too much for me, and I'd have given in to its influence like your father has done.

ARTHUR. You think it's the place?

TOM. Certain of it. This Sunday morning brings it all back to me. Sunday school and chapel in the morning, and as likely as not the minister for dinner. And the roast beef and Yorkshire pudding completely spoiled for us boys because he persisted in examining us in points of theology during the meal. Sunday school again in the afternoon, chapel in the evening. We couldn't talk about things that interested us, we couldn't laugh, we couldn't run about, we couldn't read anything except the Bible. Gad, how well I remember it. (*He shudders.*)

(*The Church bells begin to ring in the distance.*)

ARTHUR. Thank goodness it isn't quite as bad as that now.

TOM. No, even here the times have changed a little. Look here ; you and I won't go to chapel this morning. We'll stay at home instead and have a long talk.

ARTHUR. All right. (*He laughs.*) You evidently don't know what a big thing you're asking me to do.

TOM. Why ?

ARTHUR. I've never stayed at home from chapel before, except when I've been ill.

TOM. Of course ; I was forgetting. Never mind, then.

ARTHUR. No, I'll stay at home.

TOM. Is that a bargain ?

ARTHUR. Yes ; I'm in for a row already ; I may as well be hanged for a sheep as a lamb.

(MR. KENNION comes in, having changed his house-coat for a frock-coat.)

MR. K. Good-morning, Tom ; had a good breakfast ?

TOM. Splendid, thanks, Jim.

(MR. KENNION stands and looks severely at ARTHUR.)

MR. K. (*severely*). Arthur, I am not going to speak to you now, before chapel. There isn't time. I will see you after dinner. You are not to go out this afternoon. (ARTHUR rises.) Do you understand ?

ARTHUR (*sullenly*). Yes, father. (ARTHUR goes out of the room.)

MR. K. (*shaking his head*). Tom, I'd give a hundred pounds if I hadn't to have this interview with Arthur. (He sits in the chair ARTHUR has left.)

TOM. Can't you overlook it ?

MR. K. How can I ?

TOM. Let him off lightly, then.

MR. K. You're a bachelor, you don't understand. You've got no children of your own. I have a duty to perform.

TOM. Arthur's only very young.

MR. K. I know. That's why there's still a hope of reclaiming him.

TOM. Reclaiming him ! Good Lord ! Jim, you were young yourself once.

(They look gravely at each other for a space.)

Do you remember that night you and I and Frank Hewett got drunk at the *Royal George* ? Do you remember us singing hymns outside Alderman Macdougall's shop in the High Street, until a policeman came up and tried to move us on ? Have you forgotten that it was you who pushed the bobby through Alderman's plateglass window ? And surely you haven't forgotten how he chased us down High Street and along Kersley New Road, and how we climbed over Dr. Watson's wall and hid in the bushes until he'd gone by ?

MR. K. You may be sure I've never forgotten that night, Tom. It's one of the few things in my life I sincerely regret. It took place nearly thirty years ago, but I'm still ashamed of myself.

TOM. Rubbish.

MR. K. I've often wanted to pay for that window, but I never knew how to without giving myself away.

TOM (*laughing*). Ha, ha !

MR. K. I always blame Frank Hewett for that night. He led us astray. And look what a mess he made of his life afterwards.

TOM. Yes, poor chap.

MR. K. But that was the only time, Tom. It was a lesson to me. I've never tasted alcohol since that night.

TOM. Perhaps this will be a lesson to Arthur too.

MR. K. I hope so.

TOM. Well, it's a good thing he doesn't know about Alderman Macdougall's window, or it would rather spoil the effect of your sermon.

MR. K. No one knows about it except you.

TOM. Mother never got to hear about it, did she ?

MR. K. Good gracious, no. I shouldn't like mother to hear about it even now.

(MRS. KENNION *rustles in, attired in her Sunday best, all gloves, umbrella and hymn book.*)

MRS. K. Good-morning, Tom.

TOM. Good-morning.

MRS. K. Are you nearly ready, James? The bells have started.

TOM. What bells?

MRS. K. The church bells.

TOM. But you go to chapel, not to church.

MRS. K. There's no reason why we shouldn't use their bells, is there?

MR. K. (*who has been looking out of the window*). Here's mother.

MRS. K. There's a collection to-day, James, isn't there?

MR. K. Yes.

MRS. K. Have either of you got two threepenny bits for a sixpence?

MR. K. No.

TOM. No.

MRS. K. I shall have to give sixpence then.

TOM. That won't break you, will it?

MRS. K. No, but you see James collects, and so he always puts a five-shilling piece in the plate before he begins, and I think that's quite enough from one family.

(MRS. HANNAH KENNION, *an old, hard-featured but dignified woman of seventy-five, comes in slowly, dressed in widow's weeds. She carries a big hymn-book, a Bible, and an umbrella. GRACE follows her in.*)

MRS. K. (*kissing the old lady*). Well, mother?

(MR. KENNION *kisses her, and then TOM does.*)

TOM. Good-morning, mother.

MRS. HANNAH. It's a long time since I had both my boys here on a Sunday morning.

(They arrange the left-hand armchair for her and she sits.)

TOM. Quite like old times, mother.

MRS. HANNAH. You are very fortunate, Thomas. The Rev. Basil Macnamara is preaching this morning.

TOM. Is he really?

MRS. HANNAH. A very powerful preacher.

TOM. I hope he doesn't preach very long sermons.

MRS. HANNAH. No. Never more than thirty-five minutes. Sermons aren't what they used to be.

MR. K. Mother thinks we've changed for the worse, Tom.

MRS. HANNAH. I do, indeed. By the way, James, I hear that man Roberts is to be made superintendent of the Sunday School. Is it true?

MRS. K. Surely not.

MR. K. I believe so.

MRS. HANNAH. I am very much surprised.

TOM. Why, what's wrong with Mr. Roberts?

MRS. HANNAH. He is unfit for the position, I consider. He's not a gentleman.

TOM. Oh!

MRS. HANNAH. He is only a working carpenter.

(A pause.)

TOM (*quietly*). It was a carpenter who was crucified, mother.

(A slight pause.)

MRS. HANNAH (*shocked*). Please don't be irreverent, Thomas.

TOM. I hadn't the least idea of being.

MRS. HANNAH. I'm afraid it's done you no good being in Germany. A place where the theatres are open on Sunday. Little better than heathens.

REGGIE comes in ready for chapel.)

REGGIE. Morning, grandmamma.

MR. K. Where's Arthur?

REGGIE. Upstairs, I think. (*Calling through the door.*) Arthur.

ARTHUR (*in the distance*). Well?

REGGIE. Father wants you. (*Feeling his chin, he addresses the company generally.*) I wish I could afford one of those safety razors.

MR. K. You'd soon be able to afford one if you'd save your money instead of spending it foolishly.

(ARTHUR comes in, without his hat.)

MR. K. Come, Arthur, aren't you ready?

ARTHUR. I don't think I'll go to chapel this morning, father. I'll stay at home with Uncle Tom.

(General astonishment.)

MRS. HANNAH (*looking at him*). Thomas!

TOM (*shamefacedly*). I—er—thought of staying at home.

MRS. HANNAH. I hope you'll do no such thing, Thomas. Now you have come back, after all these years, I expect you to take me to chapel.

TOM (*penitently*). Very well, mother, of course I will.

MRS. HANNAH. I should think so.

(She rises. TOM gives her his arm.)

MRS. HANNAH (*handing him her Bible and hymn-book*). Carry these.

(MRS. HANNAH and TOM go to the door.)

ARTHUR (*to TOM as he passes*). Coward! (TOM smiles.)

(MRS. HANNAH and TOM go out.)

MRS. K. Aren't you well, Arthur?

ARTHUR. Quite well, thank you, mother.

MR. K. Then what's all this about not going to chapel?

ARTHUR. I don't feel inclined to go.

MR. K. Don't feel inclined ! What has that to do with it ? *I don't go to chapel because I feel inclined to go.*

ARTHUR. Don't you ? I always thought you did.

(ARTHUR takes a novel from a table, sits in the right hand armchair and takes out a cigarette.)

MR. K. Do I understand that you refuse to go ?

ARTHUR. If you like to put it that way, yes.

(MR. KENNION stands nonplussed. Then he turns to the others, who are dumb with astonishment.)

MR. K. Come, Alice, you'll be late. Reggie ! Grace !

(He waves them out. They go unwillingly. After a moment's hesitation he approaches ARTHUR.)

MR. K. Arthur, for the last time are you coming ?

ARTHUR (reading the book). No, father.

MR. K. (suppressing his righteous anger). I'll talk to you this afternoon, sir.

(MR. KENNION stalks angrily from the room. ARTHUR lights his cigarette as the curtain falls. The church bells are still ringing in the distance.)

ACT III.

The same room. The time is about half-past two in the afternoon of the same day as Act II. Dinner is cleared away. There is a dish of fruit on the side-board, and a dish of nuts with a pair of crackers.

GRACE is sitting in the right-hand armchair, and ARTHUR in the left-hand one. Both are reading novels.

ARTHUR (*looking at his watch*). I wonder how long father will be.

GRACE. I expect he doesn't want to talk to you so soon after dinner.

ARTHUR. Why? I want to go out.

GRACE. It must be bad for any one who suffers from indigestion to be angry immediately after a heavy meal.

ARTHUR. There's no need for him to be angry.

GRACE. I think he'd have got over it by this time if he'd been left to himself; but I expect grandmamma has been rubbing in the moral.

ARTHUR. Grandmamma! Does she know?

GRACE. I think so.

ARTHUR. About—last night?

GRACE. Father and mother were talking to her very earnestly after chapel. I couldn't manage to hear what they were saying, but I expect it was about that.

ARTHUR. What on earth's he told her for?

GRACE. Goodness knows!

(REGGIE *comes in.*)

REGGIE. Hello ! Any fruit knocking about ?
(*Seeing the fruit.*) Here we are.

(REGGIE *takes the fruit and the nuts and places them on the dining table. Then he sits on the corner of the table and devours grapes while he is talking.*)

GRACE. Aren't you going to Sunday school to-day?

REGGIE. No. I sent word I couldn't go because we'd got an uncle from abroad staying with us.

GRACE. What an excuse !

REGGIE. Well, why aren't you at Sunday school ?

GRACE. Never mind. I've a much better reason than you.

REGGIE. Not got it over yet, Arthur ?

ARTHUR (*shortly*). No.

(ARTHUR and GRACE *read their books.*)

REGGIE. Well, here's luck ! (*He eats a grape.*) My advice to you is stick up to the old man. Don't let him do all the talking. After all, what is a bit of a blind occasionally ? It does you good. (*He is eating grapes between the sentences.*) Getting drunk takes you away from the sordid realities of every-day life, as Shakespeare says. It's a sort of romance. And goodness knows there's not too much romance in this blooming hole. I don't know how people stick it. Uncle Tom couldn't, you see. He went abroad, and so shall I. I've finally decided ; I shall go to Canada. What I want is "a man's life."

GRACE. I wish you wouldn't talk such rot, Reggie.
(*She resumes her novel.*)

REGGIE. No, I mean it. Arthur feels just the same as I do ; only I'm going to Canada and he went on the razzle. It's quite natural. You tell father that ; say I said so.

ARTHUR. Shut up.

REGGIE (*aggrieved*). All right, I'm only trying to help you. We ought to all stick together now.

GRACE. I quite agree with Reggie there, Arthur.

ARTHUR. What about?

GRACE. We ought to make a stand as well as *you*.

ARTHUR. I can manage all right alone, thanks.

GRACE. I don't mean for your sake, I mean for ours. We're all in the same boat just now.

REGGIE. That's what I say. Of course, I'm not as bad as you two; what have *I* done? Nothing! A little dinner with a friend, that's all. But I'll stand by you all the same.

GRACE. It's a good opportunity to make father understand that we're not children any longer.

ARTHUR. Mother *and* father. She's as bad as he is.

GRACE. Oh, mother will do anything father does.

REGGIE. Yes, she's one of the old school of females.

GRACE. They are so unreasonable about little things.

REGGIE. They're out of date, that's what's the matter. And as for grandmamma, she's worse than out of date. She's what I call early Victorian.

GRACE. I shall be twenty-three next month; and just think what girls of twenty-three do nowadays.

REGGIE. Yes. Lots of them have been in gaol.

GRACE. I shall tell father that he's got to treat me differently.

REGGIE. So shall I. Bravo! Arthur, this is all owing to you. You raised the signal of revolt, and I honour you for it. (*He puts an apple in one pocket and some nuts in the other.*) If I'd thought about it I'd have done it myself.

(REGGIE goes out.)

ARTHUR. Silly young ass! (To GRACE.) You're serious about this?

GRACE. Absolutely.

ARTHUR. I think you're quite right.

GRACE. By the way, was Clifford Rawson with you last night?

ARTHUR (guiltily). Er——

GRACE. Oh, it's all right. Don't be afraid to tell me. I don't mind if he was.

ARTHUR. Well then, he was.

GRACE. I thought so. Was he—er?

ARTHUR. I don't know.

GRACE. Don't know?

ARTHUR. I mean, I don't remember. But I don't think so. I had a particular reason for getting—er—like I was, and he hadn't.

GRACE. Never mind. I shall lecture him.

ARTHUR. Don't say I gave him away.

GRACE. It doesn't matter. I'm not angry, although I don't approve of that sort of thing very much. But I don't altogether object to a boy getting drunk now and then before he's married; it acts as a sort of safety valve. The people I *do* object to are the people who never touch alcohol under any circumstances. They nearly always turn out confirmed drunkards.

(MR. KENNION comes in. He looks at GRACE.)

MR. K. I want to speak to Arthur alone, Grace.

GRACE. Very well, father.

(GRACE gets up, and with a parting smile at ARTHUR, goes out. MR. KENNION uneasily strolls across the room, up to the bow window; fidgets about, and then returns to the hearthrug, where he stands and looks at ARTHUR, who has remained in the armchair all the time.)

MR. K. Maggie has been to me to withdraw the notice she gave this morning. It appears you have already apologized to her.

ARTHUR. Yes, I apologized to her in the kitchen when you were at chapel.

MR. K. In the kitchen! Well, I must be content with that, as Maggie objects so strongly to a more public apology.

(ARTHUR *does not reply, and MR. KENNION sits in the left armchair.*)

(*Quietly.*) Well, Arthur, I have been thinking all this over. I'm not going to get into a rage and play the angry father ; although, Heaven knows, I might well be pardoned for doing so. But I try never to speak in anger ; and I cannot forget that you are a man now ; you are twenty-one. But, Arthur, if I am to treat you as a man I expect you to behave like one. I don't need to tell you that I was terribly shocked by that awful scene last night ; nor what is worse, that you have thoroughly upset your mother and your grandmother.

ARTHUR. Why did you tell grandmamma ?

MR. K. I didn't. It was your mother. I should have kept it from grandmamma, but she saw that something was wrong by your refusing to go to chapel, and she tackled your mother and got it out of her. . . . Very well, that is the most painful result of your behaviour. Then there is the effect upon Reggie. Reggie's character is not very strong, I am afraid, and I'm deeply grieved that he should have seen you in that condition. I tremble to think what may be the consequence of such an example to a young and innocent boy. . . . Then again there is Mr. Leadbitter and Mr. Fowle. Think of it ! You disgraced yourself and me before two gentlemen who have just honoured me by showing their confidence in my principles and my good influence ! It is quite possible that they will not care to ask me to represent them now.

ARTHUR. They are men of the world, 'ather.

MR. K. Men of the world ! I hate that term. It is our duty to keep ourselves unspotted by the world. At any rate, I am not going to hold them to their invitation if they already regret it. I met Mr. Leadbitter this morning and told him so.

ARTHUR. What did he say ?

MR. K. He told me not to worry my head about

it. He told me that he would say nothing about the matter and that he was sure Mr. Fowle wouldn't.

ARTHUR. Then that will be all right, father.

MR. K. No thanks to you, sir, if it is. Think how this undermines my self-respect. How am I to help to manage the affairs of a city, when I can't keep my own son in order. And think how awkward it will be during the election if this gets about.

ARTHUR. I'm very sorry, father; but I don't think it will spoil your chances.

MR. K. Sorry, sir; sorry! Are you nothing more than sorry? But I've only mentioned the *results* of your behaviour; how it affects other people. I want to talk about how it affects yourself. I want to point out to you the immorality, the licentiousness of your conduct.

ARTHUR. There's no need to.

MR. K. (*slightly raising his tone*). There *is* need to. All the more because I'm afraid you don't realize the seriousness of your offence. You're behaving too callously. What did you mean by refusing to go to chapel?

ARTHUR. I didn't want to go.

MR. K. People don't go because they want to; they go because it's their duty.

ARTHUR. I can't see any use in going to a religious service unless you go willingly.

MR. K. What do you know about it?

ARTHUR. I'm quite old enough to decide for myself.

MR. K. What do you think would be the result if every one followed his personal inclinations without restraint?

ARTHUR. Liberty.

MR. K. Rubbish. Anarchy! You can't do exactly what you like in this world. You have to be bounded by certain conventions.

ARTHUR. Yes; only people have never been able to agree about those conventions. And they never will.

MR. K. You're talking nonsense. You say you stayed at home this morning because you *wanted* to. Did you get drunk last night because you *wanted* to?

ARTHUR. Yes, certainly.

MR. K. What! You *wanted* to get drunk!

ARTHUR. I did it deliberately.

MR. K. Good heavens!

ARTHUR. I got drunk as a symbol of revolt. I wanted to show you that I'm going my own way in future.

MR. K. Do you mean to say that you're not in the least ashamed of yourself?

ARTHUR. Not at all. I'm proud of it.

MR. K. That you are actually proposing to get drunk again?

ARTHUR. Not very often, because you don't feel well after it. But I shall if I want to.

MR. K. Then you'll do it in somebody else's house, not in mine.

ARTHUR. I should like to point out that you take a much too serious view of getting drunk.

MR. K. It's a degrading, beastly habit.

ARTHUR. Yes, when you make a habit of it. Done occasionally it has its advantages.

MR. K. (*grimly*). Perhaps you will be good enough to mention them.

ARTHUR. To begin with it does away with Puritan ideas. A Puritan is a person who gets on a pedestal to look at the rest of the world. Getting drunk knocks him off the pedestal.

MR. K. But why should he be knocked off.

ARTHUR. Because he's a human being like the people he's looking down on. Only gods should stand on pedestals.

MR. K. Arthur, I believe you're going mad.

ARTHUR. Now *you're* a Puritan, father.

MR. K. I am very proud to be called a Puritan.

ARTHUR. It's a mistake. It would do you a world of good to get drunk,

MR. K. How dare you ?

ARTHUR. It would, really. At present you think you're perfect.

MR. K. I know I'm very far from perfect, but I do what I can to show people the right way.

ARTHUR. But how do you know that you know the right way ? Then again, getting drunk is only one way of letting off surplus steam. Every one has to let off his surplus steam.

MR. K. Every one doesn't get drunk.

ARTHUR. Not with beer or whisky perhaps, but there are other ways. A revival meeting is a form of drunkenness ; it is a religious debauch.

MR. K. Upon my word, Arthur, you are perfectly scandalous.

ARTHUR. No, I'm perfectly serious. The Salvation Army is only a substitute for the public house.

MR. K. And a very good substitute too. I suppose that in your enthusiasm for drunkenness you are prepared to defend the drinking habits of the working classes.

ARTHUR. Certainly. The working man isn't poor because he gets drunk. He gets drunk because he is poor. He is too poor to afford any other form of pleasure.

MR. K. Pleasure !

ARTHUR. Of course ; it *is* pleasant to get drunk, though it's beastly unpleasant afterwards. It takes those poor beggars away from their awful surroundings for a few hours. It makes them forget that next week they may not have enough to feed their wives and children.

MR. K. No wonder, if they spend their money in drink. But you, you and your friends, haven't that excuse. *You* don't need to drug yourselves in order to forget your surroundings.

ARTHUR. Yes we do. We get fearfully depressed at times. Do you suppose that a young fellow with hot blood likes stuffing in a dreary office or warehouse

six days a week. He wants to be *doing* something, not writing in ledgers and answering the telephone. I don't blame him for breaking out sometimes. Of course, he breaks out in different ways. There's Reggie, for instance, always wanting "a man's life" in Canada. That's one form of it ; getting drunk is another.

MR. K. I shall decline to listen to you any more. I don't know where you've got these ideas from.

ARTHUR. They are in the air, nowadays.

MR. K. I won't have them in my house. (*He rises.*) Now, Arthur, understand me—if you are to remain at home you'll have to behave yourself.

ARTHUR. I'll promise to behave myself—that is, not to come home drunk or do anything outrageous—if you will promise not to be always asking me where I've been or where I'm going.

MR. K. (*pathetically*). But I *must* keep an eye on you, my boy.

ARTHUR. No, you've got to trust me ; you must give me a latch-key.

MR. K. I don't know whether you're old enough for a latch-key.

ARTHUR. You are anxious enough to get me on the register with a lodger's vote ; if I'm old enough to settle the affairs of the nation, surely I'm old enough to have a latch-key.

MR. K. I shall have to think it over. I don't quite know where I am to-day. (*He passes up and down, perplexed.*)

ARTHUR. Thank you, father.

MR. K. (*quickly*). Mind, I don't promise. I must think about it.

(REGGIE comes in quickly.)

MR. K. What do you want ?

REGGIE. Clifford Rawson's come !

MR. K. Clifford Rawson ! I'd forgotten all about him. Where is he ?

REGGIE. In the drawing-room with Grace.

MR. K. With Grace ! (*Sharply.*) How long has he been here ?

REGGIE. I don't know.

MR. K. Where's your mother ? Go and find her ; tell her I want her.

(REGGIE goes out.)

MR. K. Grace had no right to see Clifford alone. Too bad of her.

(REGGIE opens the door again.)

REGGIE. Here's grandmamma.

(REGGIE disappears as MRS. HANNAH enters.)

MRS. HANNAH. Good-afternoon, James. (*Looking at ARTHUR disapprovingly.*) Well, sir ?

ARTHUR (*rising*). Good-afternoon, grandmamma.

MRS. HANNAH (*sitting in the left armchair*). Aren't you ashamed of yourself ?

MR. K. I have already spoken to Arthur, mother.

MRS. HANNAH (*contemptuously*). All this is owing to your mistaken leniency. You don't know how to manage a son.

MR. K. (*nettled*). I ought to know. I had the advantage of your training.

MRS. HANNAH. Yes. You were more fortunate in your parents than Arthur is.

(MRS. KENNION, followed by TOM and REGGIE, comes in.)

MR. K. (*to MRS. KENNION*). Clifford Rawson is in the drawing-room with Grace. I shall have to go and see him. Will you come with me or not ?

MRS. K. What do you think ?

MR. K. I think you'd better.

MRS. K. What are you going to say to him ?

MR. K. I'm not quite certain.

MRS. HANNAH. That was always your great fault, James ; you never could make up your mind.

MR. K. I like to try and be fair, mother ; and see both sides of a question.

MRS. HANNAH. It's best to see only one side, if you wish to get your own way.

(TOM has seated himself by the desk on the left, where he smokes and watches the others. ARTHUR, after rising, has pushed the right armchair further to the right, away from the hearth. MRS. KENNION is standing by the right armchair, MRS. HANNAH sitting in the left one. ARTHUR beside MRS. KENNION, and MR. KENNION in the middle of the group, near the table. REGGIE is behind the table, helping himself to fruit.)

(The door bursts open and GRACE enters dragging in CLIFFORD RAWSON, an ordinary, good-natured, pleasant young fellow of twenty-four.)

GRACE. Clifford and I want your consent to our engagement, father.

MR. K. Grace ! This is too bad of you, really.

GRACE. What is ?

MR. K. Taking us by surprise like this. (To CLIFFORD.) Good-afternoon.

CLIFFORD. Good-afternoon, sir. (To MRS. KENNION.) Good-afternoon. (He bows to MRS. HANNAH and TOM.)

GRACE. That is our Uncle Tom.

TOM. How do you do.

CLIFFORD. Pleased to meet you.

MR. K. Was there any need for this hurry, Clifford ?

CLIFFORD. It's not my fault, Mr. Kennion, Grace insisted on coming in and asking you at once.

MRS. HANNAH (*snorting*). Upon my word ! I don't know what girls are coming to.

MRS. K. It really is most embarrassing, Grace.

TOM. Perhaps I'd better withdraw.

GRACE. Certainly not, Uncle Tom ; Clifford doesn't mind. Do you, Clifford ?

CLIFFORD (*looking round*). Er, no. I suppose not. I want Mr. Kennion to say yes, that's all.

MR. K. Before I can say "yes" there are certain questions that I should like you to answer.

TOM. I'm sure I'd better clear out. Come along, mother.

(*He offers his arm to Mrs. HANNAH.*)

MRS. HANNAH. Certainly not. I shall stop here.

MR. K. Where were you last night, Clifford?

CLIFFORD (*startled*). Last night?

MR. K. Yes. Were you with Arthur?

(*A pause. CLIFFORD looks at ARTHUR and raises his eyes inquiringly.*)

MR. K. Come.

CLIFFORD (*taking the plunge*). Yes; I was with Arthur.

MR. K. Ah. I'm glad *you* haven't told me a lie, at any rate.

CLIFFORD. You see, I wasn't certain whether you knew or not.

MR. K. You admit you were with Arthur last night. That admission makes it easier for me to give you an answer at once. I haven't sufficient confidence in you to allow Grace to become engaged to you.

CLIFFORD. But why?

MR. K. I'm sorry—I don't think you are steady.

CLIFFORD. What reason have you for thinking that?

MR. K. You are a friend of Arthur's, for one thing.

CLIFFORD. What! I'm not fit to marry your daughter because I'm a friend of your son!

MR. K. Arthur came home disgracefully drunk last night.

CLIFFORD. He's never done such a thing before.

MR. K. How do I know that is true?

CLIFFORD. Ask any of the fellows. Why he doesn't care for beer, and he positively hates whisky. He got drunk last night quite by accident.

MR. K. He told me he did it on purpose, as a symbol of revolt.

CLIFFORD. No, it was an accident.

ARTHUR. I don't see what all this has to do with Grace's engagement.

CLIFFORD (*hotly*). Here's Mr. Kennion objecting to me because of your disgraceful behaviour. I'm only telling him that you're not so bad as he thinks you are.

ARTHUR. Just mind your own business, please, Clifford.

CLIFFORD. It *is* my business. (*To MR. KENNION.*) Look here, sir, Arthur and I and some of the fellows went into the *Royal George* smoke-room last night for a drink. Arthur was talking about the way you are always nagging at him and asking him where he's been ; and he said he wasn't going to stand it any longer. We sympathized with him, of course, and advised him to have it out with you. Well, he said he would if he could only make up his mind, only he was a bit afraid of tackling you. We advised him to have a whisky and soda to buck him up. He had a couple, but still he funk'd it. You see, the idea was to screw his courage up to sticking point, so we persuaded him to go on with the whisky and soda. Unfortunately, he isn't accustomed to drinking spirits, and we made a mistake and screwed him up too far. In fact he got completely screwed.

ARTHUR (*indignantly*). You're a low cad to give a fellow away like this, Clifford.

MR. K. (*to ARTHUR*). I thought you got drunk as a protest, a symbol of revolt.

ARTHUR (*annoyed*). I know I said I did. I thought I might as well make the best of it after it had happened.

MR. K. I am very glad to find that you've not been as bad as I feared. (*To CLIFFORD.*) However, this explanation doesn't make any difference to my opinion of you. I like you, Clifford, I always have liked you ;

but you haven't the strength of character that I should wish to see in the man who is to marry Grace.

GRACE. Father, I don't at all insist on strength of character in my husband.

MR. K. (*grimly*). I do, my dear.

GRACE. But *you* won't have to live with him. If I've got to live with a man all my life he ought to be some one *I* like, not some one *you* like.

MRS. K. I wish you wouldn't put it like that, Grace.
"Live with a man!" It doesn't sound proper.

MR. K. Let me try and make you see this in a reasonable light.

MRS. HANNAH. Now you're going to give in to them, James.

MR. K. I am not going to give in to them, Mother.

GRACE. Then it's really no use continuing the conversation.

MRS. K. (*pathetically*). Oh, Grace, do listen to your father; he means well.

MRS. HANNAH. Girls didn't behave like this when I was young.

MR. K. I hope you are not going to be stubborn, Grace, and upset your mother. We have had enough worry with the three of you; you and Arthur and Reggie.

REGGIE. There! Now I'm to be dragged into this, I suppose. I'm sure I've not done anything very serious.

MR. K. You've told me a lie.

REGGIE. Oh, you've got to tell a good many fibs before you die.

MR. K. It is not a matter of telling fibs. You have all three told me downright elaborate, calculated lies. If there is one thing I object to it is a lie.

ARTHUR. I don't know how you get on in business if you never tell one.

MR. K. I prefer to tell the truth even if I lose money by it. (*To GRACE.*) Now, Grace, are you going to be reasonable?

GRACE. I want to marry Clifford.

MR. K. No.

CLIFFORD. But give me your reasons.

MR. K. I *have* given them.

CLIFFORD. You've said something about strength of character—

MR. K. If you wish me to put it plainly I'm afraid you drink.

CLIFFORD. I don't.

MR. K. Have you ever been drunk?

CLIFFORD. Once or twice.

MR. K. (*with a gesture*). Very well! What did I say?

CLIFFORD. Getting tight once or twice isn't the same as drinking.

MR. K. If there is a difference it is not worth discussing.

CLIFFORD. But you must know that every fellow gets drunk some time or other.

MR. K. I hope not, for the sake of this country. The man who has once been drunk is never to be relied on. He may break out at any time.

ARTHUR. Father, you're so unreasonable! You must have been young once. (*A slight pause.*) Have you never been drunk yourself?

MRS. K. (*reproachfully*). Oh, Arthur!

MR. K. (*staggered*). What do you say?

ARTHUR. Have you never been drunk yourself?

(*A pause.* MR. KENNION slowly turns his head and looks at TOM; who with a suppressed giggle, which he turns into a laugh, rises quickly and walks to the bow window where he stands with his back to them all, looking out of the window.)

MRS. HANNAH. This is the new fashioned way of bringing up your children, James. My children never put such a question to me.

MRS. K. Arthur, how can you ask your father such a thing?

ARTHUR. I notice he hasn't answered me.

MR. K. (*collecting himself*). Eh? What's that?

ARTHUR. I say you haven't answered me.

MRS. K. It isn't necessary for your father to answer such a question.

TOM (*coming down*). Why not?

MR. K. Do you think it is?

TOM. Certainly. It is very necessary. If you refuse to answer, Arthur and the others would be justified in putting the worst construction on your refusal.

MR. K. Very well (*with an effort*). I have never been drunk in my life.

(*A pause.*)

MRS. HANNAH. I brought up my boys strict teetotalers. I don't know what habits you have contracted in that dissolute Germany, Thomas; but I feel sure James, at least, has never touched a drop of intoxicating liquor. Have you, James?

MR. K. (*dully*). No, Mother.

ARTHUR. What! Never?

TOM (*quietly*). You don't suppose that your father would tell you a *lie*, do you, Arthur?

(MR. KENNION casts an agonized glance at TOM, and goes to the table where he sits with his back half turned to them all, resting his head on his hands.)

MRS. K. There, now, you've upset your father.

CLIFFORD. I'm sorry to interrupt this discussion, but it really doesn't interest me. I want to be engaged to Grace; and I don't mind at all whether Mr. Kennion was ever drunk or not. I shouldn't let that affect our engagement in the least.

MRS. HANNAH. Young man, since my son doesn't seem disposed to answer you, I'll answer you myself. Our family has always been a strict, upright, God-fearing family. My grandfather was a disciple and a friend of John Wesley himself. We've always tried

to keep up the tradition in the family. Some of the younger members have fallen away sadly, of late ; but I blame their father, my son James, for that. They say he's been too harsh with them ; I say (*with great force*) that he's not been harsh enough. There's original sin in every young man and young woman, and it's got to be stamped out of them. Yes, scourged out of them with whips, and burnt out of them with fire if need be. James has been to blame in that respect ; but it can't be helped now, it's too late. But it's not too late to refuse to admit you into the family. There's no need to let Grace marry a light-minded and vicious man, when she might marry a God-fearing man who goes to the chapel.

GRACE (*protesting*). Grandmamma.

MRS. HANNAH. If I'd my way I'd put her under lock and key if she refused to obey her parents, just as I'd turn my son out of doors if he came home drunk. (*She looks at ARTHUR.*)

ARTHUR (*quietly*). We are in the twentieth century now.

MRS. HANNAH. Thank God I shall not live to see the twenty-first.

MRS. K. (*moved*). Mother, I can't bear to hear you say such things. I know my children have been very wrong and sinful, but I can't forget that they are very young. They'll be less hasty when they grow older, and they'll think more about what they are doing. James couldn't dream of doing what you suggest, Mother ; and if he did I wouldn't let him.

MRS. HANNAH. You're not of my generation, Alice. You're of a younger and softer generation.

MRS. K. (*her eyes full of tears*). I'm thankful I am. Your generation is too hard for me.

(MAGGIE comes in with a letter.)

GRACE. What is it, Maggie ?

MAGGIE. Mr. Fowle has sent this note across,

miss, for the master. There's no answer. (MAGGIE goes out.)

MRS. K. (*taking the note from GRACE.*) Father, here's a letter from Mr. Fowle.

MR. K. (*rousing himself*). Eh ? Thank you. (*He takes it, opens it, and reads it.*)

TOM. This is no business of mine, I know ; but perhaps you won't think it impertinent if I say a few words.

MRS. K. Of course not, Tom.

TOM. To begin with, I'm afraid we can't adopt your suggestions, mother.

MRS. HANNAH. You never would take my advice, Thomas.

TOM. No. I was too young to take your advice once, and now I'm too old. This is *my* proposal.

(MR. KENNION *listens.*)

Consent to an engagement between Grace and Clifford. Let them see each other freely, for a year, at least. Only let Clifford understand that he is on probation ; that he's got to behave himself.

CLIFFORD. I'll promise that.

TOM. I think you may. It makes a wonderful difference to a fellow when he has an object in life. As for Arthur. If you'll allow me, Jim, I'll take him back with me to Hamburg, and find him plenty of work to do. (*To ARTHUR.*) Will you come ?

ARTHUR (*jumping at it*). Rather !

MRS. HANNAH (*to ARTHUR*). Yes. That's what *you* want. To get away from the restraint of home.

TOM. Why not ? It'll do him good. Home life is not an unmixed blessing. Now, Jim, what do you say ?

MR. K (*rising*). I've been thinking it all over, Tom, while I've been sitting here. I will admit that I've changed my mind to some extent.

TOM. Ah, something has made you change your mind,

MR. K. Yes ; something. Clifford, Grace, I think we had better do what Uncle Tom suggests.

GRACE (*throwing her arms round him*). Dear father !

CLIFFORD (*grasping his hand*). Thank you, sir.

MR. K. But mind, Clifford—Grace, you're stifling me—you must deal honourably with me.

CLIFFORD. I will.

MR. K. And if you like to take Arthur for a year or so, Tom, I think it would be a good idea.

ARTHUR. Thank you, father.

TOM. Then that's all right.

MRS. K. I'm so glad we're not going to have any difficulty. I'm sure it's all for the best.

(MRS. HANNAH snorts.)

TOM. What does Fowle say, Jim ?

MR. K. Fowle ? Oh, yes. (*Referring to the letter.*) He says :—

“ Don't be a fool. You've got to stand for the Council. You are an honourable man with a clean record, and they're not so easy to find nowadays. Leadbitter and I won't breathe a word about high old times on Saturday night, if that's what you are afraid of.

GRACE. That's not all, father. (*She has been looking over his shoulder.*)

MR. K. That is all that matters.

GRACE. Oh, listen to this. (*She takes the letter.*)

“ I rather admire Arthur. He is a young sport. I didn't think he had it in him.”

MR. K. There was no need to read that, Grace. However, I shall stand for the Council, after all.

GRACE. I hope you'll get in, father. You deserve to. (*She kisses him.*) Clifford, there's a fire in the drawing-room. Come along.

MRS. K. You'll stay to tea, Clifford ?

CLIFFORD. Thanks very much.

(CLIFFORD and GRACE go out.)

TOM. I'm off early to-morrow morning, Arthur. If you're coming with me you'll have to pack up to-night.

ARTHUR. I'll begin now. Will you come and help me, mother?

MRS. K. Yes, dear, in a little while.

(ARTHUR runs out.)

REGGIE (*coming forward*). Look here, what about me?

MR. K. Well, what about you?

REGGIE. You've fixed up Arthur and Grace all right; it's my turn now. I'm going out to Canada.

MRS. K. Don't be silly, dear.

REGGIE. I've made up my mind. I shall go out to join Tommy Leslie. All I want is £100 for my outfit, and to give me a start over there.

MR. K. And where are you going to get your £100?

REGGIE. I want you to lend it me.

MR. K. Do you? You will have to want a long time.

REGGIE. It's jolly mean of you. Uncle Tom, will you lend me £100?

TOM. I'm afraid I haven't got it about me just at present. (*He feels in his pockets.*)

REGGIE. You've no need to make fun of me, any way. You don't sympathize with me, that's what it is. You don't know what it is to want to live "a man's life." Wait until I'm twenty-one. You'll see.

(REGGIE goes out sulkily.)

(MRS. HANNAH rises slowly.)

MRS. K. Are you going, mother?

MRS. HANNAH. Yes.

MRS. K. Won't you stay to tea?

MRS. HANNAH. No, I will not stay to tea.

(MRS. KENNION goes to the door to see MRS. HANNAH out.)

MRS. HANNAH. You've given in to them, James. I wouldn't have given in to them.

(MRS. HANNAH goes out, *proud, stern and erect.* MRS. KENNION follows.)

MR. K. (*as soon as they are gone.*) Tom! I told a lie.

TOM. Yes. A pretty big one, too.

MR. K. Good God! After what I had just been saying about telling the truth! But what could I do? Could I have told them about getting drunk and breaking Alderman MacDougall's window and being chased by a policeman?

TOM. You *could* have told them, of course.

MR. K. Reggie, and Arthur and Grace! And mother too; what would she have thought about me?

TOM. It would have done mother good to know that her system didn't work as well as she thinks it did.

MR. K. But do you blame me? Where would my authority have been if I'd told them?

TOM. I think you did quite right, old fellow. And it will do *you* good too. You won't be so inclined to get on a pedestal and look down on the rest of the world, in future.

MR. K. Get on a pedestal! That's what Arthur said to me this afternoon.

TOM. Ah! That lad has some good ideas in his head. He only needs letting alone.

(MRS. KENNION returns.)

TOM. Mother gone?

MRS. K. Yes.

TOM. I'll just run after her and walk home with her. She's a little put out, I'm afraid. I'll see whether I can talk her round.

(TOM goes out.)

(MRS. KENNION sits in the left armchair. MR. KEN-

NION draws the right armchair up to the hearth. MRS. KENNION has her handkerchief out.)

MRS. K. I hope it's all for the best. We seem to be out of sympathy with mother, and with the children too.

MR. K. Mother is very old, and the children are very young. We must make allowances for them.

(MR. KENNION sits in right armchair.)

MRS. K. I sometimes wonder whether we are quite right after all.

(MRS. KENNION wipes her eyes. MR. KENNION leans forward and pats her knee gently. They sit staring into the fire for a very long time ; silent, immobile. The curtain creeps down very, very slowly.)



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